



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Karen F. Morton, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, September 11, 2012

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Streeter

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2012-0258 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meetings of August 7, 2012, August 15, 2012, August 21, 2012, and September 4, 2012 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Schmidt, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2012-0265 Results of Operations - FYE 2012

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Sal Pandolfo, Director of Finance, reviewed the unaudited results of operations for FYE 2012. Expenditures came in under budget by \$1.3 million. Revenues were approximately \$780,000 under budget. Mr. Pandolfo reviewed the breakdown of the figures. There was a 98.1% tax collection rate. For FYE 2012, only \$353,000 was required from Fund Balance instead of the \$866,130 projected.

Councilor Flax requested the last five to eight years of actuals compared to budget for each department. Mr. Pandolfo noted that there are variables every year within departments that may not be apparent. Town Manager Oefinger stated that he can provide the information, but he is concerned that Councilors may draw the wrong conclusions. Town personnel put together honest budgets and are frugal during the year. The Town should always be in a position to return money instead of asking for more. An average overage should not be used to cut the budget. The Town Manager noted that there are a number of factors that go into the bottom line figure including revenues which are Best guess'estimates at the time the budget is developed.

No other Councilors expressed an interest in receiving the information requested by Councilor Flax.

Mr. Pandolfo explained that the Town's Fund Balance goal is 7.5%. This savings increases the Fund Balance to 7.7%. Groton remains below the comparable towns in its peer group where the median Fund Balance is 10.5% median and the mean is 11.1%.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that when there is savings in the budget, it should be used to improve the Town's situation. If these dollars are not used to increase the Fund Balance, they become revenue used to pay for next year's budget. It is difficult to increase the Fund Balance at budget time because people do not like to pay taxes to increase the Fund Balance. The Town Manager strongly recommends applying this savings to the Fund Balance. The Town will be going to the bond market within the next year. Although the Town has been able to maintain its Fund Balance, it has not increased. Increasing the Fund Balance sends a strong message to the bond rating agencies.

The Town Manager explained the difference between Fund Balance and the General Fund balance using an analogy of a personal savings account and a commitment to maintain a certain level in the account. There have been discussions about increasing the Town's Fund Balance over time. The Town Manager explained that there is no 'fight' percentage. There are many factors to consider including trends, peer comparisons, and what is happening in the community. What appears to be most important to the bond rating agencies is discipline and continued improvement.

Councilor Flax expressed support for leaving the excess in the General Fund. Councilor Morton agreed noting too many unknowns in the upcoming budget.

Further discussion of this topic will take place as part of the FYE 2014 Budget discussion in the future.

2012-0259**Sandy Hollow Road Curbing****Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted that a petition with a number of signatures was submitted to the Council asking that curbing be installed on Sandy Hollow Road. The road has already been paved. Some curbing has been installed on Sandy Hollow Road in the past to deal with localized drainage issues. There are no drainage structures on the road. If the road is curbed in its entirety, the Town will have to install a drainage system and obtain necessary permitting. The Town Manager encouraged Councilors to look at the road. A uniform curb treatment would not be in the spirit of the scenic road ordinance. Regardless of what the Council decides, curbing could not be accomplished this year because of the need to design drainage and obtain permits.

Councilors received a communication from Marilyn Comrie in support of curbing.

Discussion followed on the curbing that already exists and how many people who signed the petition already have curbing. The Town Manager suggested that if the Council decides to curb the entire road, it also consider removing Sandy Hollow Road from the scenic road list. The cost for just curbing is estimated at \$35,000, not including drainage.

It was noted that the scenic road ordinance allows the Council to approve road modifications for "good cause."

Councilor Flax suggested that residents who do not have curbing and want it seek the Council's approval individually. Councilors asked the Town Manager to provide information on people who

2012-0260

signed the petition that do not currently have curbing.

Spicer Fund Fundraiser**Discussed and Recommended no action taken**

Marge Fondulas, Director of Human Services, expressed a concern that the Spicer Fund is nearing the end of its life. The funds being appropriated on an annual basis are depleting the fund and it is not earning sufficient interest. In addition, community needs are increasing. Ms. Fondulas is trying to figure out ways to increase the fund. There has been a discussion about conducting a car raffle, but Ms. Fondulas was advised by the Town Clerk that the Town cannot sponsor it and there would have to be a 501(c)3 organization to conduct the raffle on the Town's behalf. In addition, there are stringent IRS regulations.

Ms. Fondulas noted that the Town provides funding to outside cultural and social service agencies (\$57,000 in FYE 2013) and she asked if some of those funds could be redirected to the Spicer Fund. Ms. Fondulas noted that the outside agency funding is used to support unduplicated essential services, but the Spicer Fund is an incredible resource that provides \$300 per household per year for those in need. Ms. Fondulas suggested a cap on total outside agency funding and on each agency.

Ms. Fondulas provided examples of how the Spicer Fund is used including burials, prescriptions, doctor fees, rents, utilities, etc. For rents, the \$300 is provided in conjunction with other assistance funds.

Councilor Peruzzotti suggested a referral to the Community and Cultural Committee for a discussion and prioritization of the agencies that the Town contributes to.

Ms. Fondulas noted that no one in need has been turned down yet due to a lack of funding, but people have been turned down because of timing or because they have reached their assistance limit.

Mayor Somers cited an example of an animal shelter in Chicago that solicits "in memoriam" donations with quarterly reminded letters. The Mayor suggested that the Town advertise the history of the Spicer Fund, what it does, how it helps people, etc. and solicit donations.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town has a number of options including depleting the fund; providing a direct subsidy into the fund; and fundraising. With respect to outside agencies, the Town has decreased those donations over the years (from approximately \$80,000 to \$57,000) and there has already been a concerted effort to prioritize them. The Town Manager asked the Council to consider a number of options. The consensus of the Council was to consider all options, but not to deplete the fund.

2012-0266

Connection Fund Donation**Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted receipt of an unsolicited check in the amount of \$10,000 from The Connection Fund, Inc. that owns a number of properties in the Town. The Connection Fund, Inc. provided the donation as a payment in lieu of taxes. The check has been deposited into the General Fund, but the Town Manager asked the Council if they would like to consider directing the funds someplace else, such as the Spicer Fund. Discussion followed and Councilors expressed support for moving the funds to the Spicer Fund.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

Discussion followed on the trust fund and interest earning.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0200 Adoption of an Ordinance Changing and Redefining the Voting Districts**Discussed**

The Town Manager provided background on this ordinance, noting that the Town Council approved a resolution modifying the voting districts in accordance with the state senate/assembly district lines. The Council must now decide how to proceed with an ordinance. At a minimum, an ordinance must be passed that reaffirms the lines established by resolution. Councilor Johnson suggested a committee to meet with the Town Manager, Town Clerk and Registrars of Voters to review a map and make suggestions for district consolidation. Councilors Johnson, Peruzzotti and Schmidt volunteered.

2012-0201 Resolution Authorizing Use of a Description of the Ordinance Changing and Redefining the Voting Districts**Tabled****2012-0175 FYE 2014 Budget Process****Discussed**

The Committee of the Whole scheduled a special meeting for September 18th at 6:00 p.m. to discuss the FYE 2014 budget process. The Town Manager asked Councilors to review the Looking Ahead excerpt from the FYE 2013 budget.

2012-0157 OpSail 2012 - Update**Discussed and Recommended no action taken**

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the people involved in OpSail are considering establishing another committee to attract additional events to New London Harbor. There was a conscious decision by the Town not to participate in OpSail 2012. The Town Manager asked the Council if there is an interest in being involved going forward. Mayor Somers expressed support noting the assets in Town and the opportunities presented by the Thames Street Rehabilitation Project. She feels that there may be economic benefits and an opportunity to showcase the Town. The consensus of the Council was that the Town should be involved in discussions. Councilor Peruzzotti volunteered to attend the meetings.

2012-0005 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2012 Standing Referral)**Discussed**

There will be a joint meeting with the Board of Education on Monday, September 17th at 6:00 p.m. The primary purpose of the meeting is to discuss redistricting. Other topics for discussion are the school facilities initiative, middle school consolidation, Superintendent update, and the baseball agreement.

2012-0231 Amended Agreement Regarding Fitch High School Baseball Field - Update

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to enter executive session at 8:57 p.m. to discuss 2012-0231 Amended Agreement Regarding Fitch High School Baseball Field and to invite the Town Manager to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 9:34 p.m.

2012-0225 Town Manager Annual Evaluation

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Flax, to enter executive session at 9:35 p.m. to discuss 2012-0225 Town Manager Annual Evaluation and to invite the Town Manager to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The Town Manager exited the executive session at 10:00 p.m. at the request of the Council.

The executive session concluded at 10:39 p.m.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 p.m.